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ABSTRACT

Patterns of relationships among the variables of pregnancy status at marriage, marital dissolution probabilities, residence and migration status, and race were ascertained. The data source was the 1967 Survey of Economic Opportunity, a large national probability sample expanded to U.S. population parameters. Relationships among these variables were rather different for rural to urban migrants than for either the rural population of origin or the urban host population, generally exceeding these 2 populations for marital dissolution probabilities. Tentative explanations were offered for: (1) the lower probability of marital instability among rural women; (2) the finding that, although among women who marry very young (under 18), those premaritally pregnant have more stable marriages than their conventional counterparts, the probabilities of marital dissolution tend to decrease as age at marriage increases; and (3) the striking differences in marital formation and dissolution patterns between Negro and white women (i.e., urban white women had slightly higher proportions with conventional family patterns while rural white women had the smallest percentage postmaritally pregnant; exactly the opposite held for Negro women). (Author/KM)

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FAMILY FORMATION AND DISSOLUTION PATTERNS: RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES *

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ABSTRACT

Patterns of relationships among the variables of pregnancy status at marriage, marital dissolution probabilities, residence and migration status, and race are ascertained. The data source is the 1967 Survey of Economic Opportunity, a large national probability sample expanded to U.S. population parameters. Relationships among these variables are rather different for rural to urban migrants than was found among either the rural population of origin or the urban host population. Rather than being intermediate to these two populations in terms of marital dissolution probabilities, they generally exceed both. Tentative explanations are offered of: (1) the lower probability of marital instability found among rural women, (2) the finding that among women who marry while very young, those premaritally pregnant have more stable marriages than their conventional counterparts, and (3) the striking Negro-white differences in marital formation and dissolution patterns.

FAMILY FORMATION AND DISSOLUTION PATTERNS: RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES

Various studies by Christensen (e.g. 1963; Christensen and Meissner, 1953) have shown that women pregnant at the time of their first marriage have significantly higher incidences of divorce than do those postmaritally pregnant. Covar (1970) investigated the incidence of premarital pregnancy by race as related to selected social and economic characteristics of her family. Bacon (1973) reported data on relationships among pregnancy status and age at marriage, and marital instability probabilities by race.

Covar's data did not contain information on divorce and separation for her sample of mothers. Christensen pointed to the problem of losing part of his sample through out-migration, which may have biased his pregnancy status at marriage-marital stability relationships. This was a consequence of his "record linkage" technique, whereby marriage, child birth, and divorce records for residents of given counties were examined longitudinally. Bacon did not control for migration in the analysis of these pregnancy status at marriage--marital stability relationships.

In this analysis, residence and migration are controlled to determine if these variables affect: 1) whether differential probabilities that pregnancy or child birth preceeding marriage are associated with women being of rural or urban origins; 2) whether residence patterns are related to pregnancy status-marital stability relationships; and 3) whether migrants and nonmigrants differ in their fertility-marital behaviors.

The following residence-migration categories are employed: 1) Rural women of rural origins; 2) Rural-to-urban migrants; 3) Urban women of urban origins.

The Data

Data employed here are from the 1967 Survey of Economic Opportunity (SEO). The SEO is a national sample of individuals, adults, interview units, and households expanded to population parameters (Bowles, et.al., 1973). Special tabulations made for this study are from the U.S.D.A. -- University of Georgia version of these files.

Women aged seventeen years or older are identified. From these, all ever-married mothers constitute the population of analysis. Excluded are: 1) married women with no children, and 2) mothers who reported never having married. Data files also are excluded for women for whom information is not available on: time of marriage, the status of their first marriage, and residence-migration histories.

Operational Definitions. All women with an interval between their first marriage and the birth of their first child of eight months or less are labeled pregnant when married. Those who reported giving birth prior to their first marriage are identified as premarital mothers. The term premaritally pregnant embraces the above two categories of women. Those women with a marriage-fertility interval of nine months or more are treated as postmaritally pregnant, or conventional.

Marital dissolution refers to the woman's first marriage ending in divorce or separation. Migrants are operationally defined as persons who had at any time lived more than 50 miles from their 1967 address in the SEO, and the standard U.S. Census criterion of places less than 2500 in population and residence in the open country are classified as rural.

The residence of origin is that reported by the respondent, and therefore is somewhat subjective.

The category of women identified as rural of rural origins includes rural nonmigrants and women who migrated from one rural place to another. Urban women of urban origins is a parallel concept. Rural to urban migrants had moved 50 miles or more and had also left a rural environment for an urban one. For women who had migrated more than once, residence of origin refers to type of residence lived in when the respondent was sixteen years of age or younger.

Marital dissolution includes marriages that ended in divorce, and those where the couple was separated at the time of the SEO. Race of respondent was based on the judgment of the interviewer and reflects the race of the head of the unit. These categories are white, Negro, and "other non-white" races. The categories of Negro and white are presented separately here, and "all races" includes other non-whites. Therefore, white and Negro subtotals do not sum precisely to the "all races" total.

FINDINGS

Family Formation Patterns by Residence and Race. Data presented in Table 1 indicate few differences at the "all races" level of pregnancy status at marriage associated with residence status. However, when race is controlled, some important differences in family formation patterns are associated with residence status, especially for Negro women.

(Table 1 about here)

Among white women, those were of urban residence in 1967 and who also were of urban origins had slightly higher proportions with conventional

family formation patterns (i.e. were postmaritally pregnant). Rural women of rural origins had the smallest percentage postmaritally pregnant, and rural to urban migrants were intermediate. Differences, however, were slight.

For Negro women, just the opposite relationships held between residence and family formation patterns, and differences were more pronounced. Rural Negroes had the most conventional marriages, urban women were least conventional, and rural to urban migrants were intermediate.

Negro-White Differences. Differences in family formation patterns by race were least among rural women, were intermediate among rural to urban migrants, and were greatest for urban women. Differences by race were largest in the child before marriage category, with Negro women having rates eight times that of whites.

Pregnancy Status and Marital Dissolution by Residence Status. The data in Table II reveal some striking differences in relationships among pregnancy status at marriage, race, residence status, and marital instability incidences.

(Table II about here)

Rural women have considerably more stable marriages than do those of the other two residence categories. Marital instability levels are greatest among rural to urban migrants, but there rates are only slightly greater than among urban women. At the all races level, marital instability probabilities are lowest among postmaritally pregnant women.

When race is controlled, different patterns of relationships among pregnancy status at marriage and marital stability are evident. In each residence category, white women with conventional family formation experiences are more stable than among the premaritally pregnant. In stark contrast, Negro women in each residence category exhibit greater probabilities of marital instability if they experienced conventional family formation processes.

In each residence and family formation category, Negro women had roughly twice the incidences of divorce and separation than did whites.

Age at Marriage. The age at which important life cycle events occur is an important variable in the history of the individual, and for most directly affected by these events. When these events have to do with family formation, the future of the family is profoundly influenced by the age of the woman when family processes are initiated (Bacon, 1974).

Data in Table 3 indicate how marital dissolution probabilities are affected by the age of the women at marriage, when pregnancy status, race, and residence are controlled simultaneously. Marital dissolution probabilities tend to decrease substantially as age of marriage increases.

(Table III about here)

Relationships among the variables controlled in Table 3 are complex, but some important patterns are evident. First, rural women of rural origins have substantially more stable marriages than do urban women. Second, Negro women have significantly higher probabilities of marital instability than do white women. Third, probabilities of marital stability increase with increases in the age of women when married. Fourth, premaritally pregnant women who marry at ages under eighteen have more stable marriages than do their postmaritally pregnant counterparts. Fifth, an interaction effect is operative among the variables, producing a pronounced range in marital instability probabilities.

Discussion

Marital dissolution probabilities vary greatly with race, age at marriage, and residence status. These relationships are evident in the data, and pose relatively few problems in explanation. Relationships between pregnancy status at marriage and marital dissolution are more complex,

and are more difficult to explain.

Among women in both the urban residence of urban origins and the rural to urban migration categories, the most stable marriages were for those who married after reaching twenty-two years of age and were postmaritally pregnant. However, the most stable marriages for both Negroes and whites were for premaritally pregnant women aged twenty-two or over at marriage among rural women. Thus, relationships between pregnancy status at marriage and marital dissolution among women who marry as adults are in opposite directions.

Data in Table III also indicate that declines in marital dissolution probabilities associated with increases in age at marriage are much more pronounced for urban women than for rural women.

These two sets of findings suggest a tentative explanation; that social norms in rural segments of society are highly supportive of marital stability regardless of pregnancy status at marriage, or age at marriage. Furthermore, the generally higher probabilities of marital instability among rural to urban migrants than among either rural women are urban women of urban origins suggests the operation of a kind of cultural shock attending changing social environments.

While residence and migration status, age at marriage, and pregnancy status at marriage make independent contributions to differences in family dissolution probabilities, race remains a profoundly important explanatory variable. That marital instability probabilities are greater among Negroes than whites in this society has been documented by Frazier (1939), Myrdal (1944), and Moynihan (1965), among others (e.g. see Furley and Hermalin (1971) for a recent assessment). An adequate explanation for this difference is another matter, however.

Moynihan, in an otherwise brilliant analysis, weakened his well considered argument that economic variables are the primary contengencies affecting Negro-white marital instability probabilities by claiming that current family

instability among Negroes is a consequence of slavery.

That Negro marriages are more unstable than those of whites seems more reasonably attributable to the Negro male being frozen out of the labor market following the Civil War (Fogel and Engerman, 1974). Negro families began their historic movement to the urban ghettos, and their previously strongly patriarchal family form that characterize rural farm families, whether white or Negro, was transformed.

With the loss of his ability to perform his socially dominant provider role in the family, the father-husband position disappeared from the group. The family took the form of a partrial, extended, matriarch, devoid of the husband-father as an integral structural feature.

A haunting prospect is suggested by the evidence of marital and fertility behavior in Negro families that are characterized by lack of dependency on a father-husband. As women and children become less dependent on the adult male, will the urban middle class family of whatever race assume this emergent form, the partial extended family?

The substantial differences between rural and urban women, and between whites and Negroes, are undoubtedly attributable in part to two major variables: (1) the continuing rural-urban differences in the sociocultural prescriptions and proscriptions regarding marital formation and dissolution patterns, and (2) the very real subcultural differences defining appropriate familial behavior associated with race in this society.

However, an adequate sociologically explanation of the complex empirical relationships among these variables is yet to be developed. Hopefully these data will help provide the basis for an inductively generated theory that will explain these profoundly important variables associated with family processes.

TABLE I

Pregnancy Status at First Marriage of Ever Married Mothers by Residence Status and Race*

Rural of Rural Origins

Ever Married Mothers at Risk of Marital Dissolution	All Races** (000)	Percent Dist.	White (000)	Percent Dist.	Negro (000)	Percent Dist.
Total	8,397	100.0	7,772	100.0	572	100.0
Child before marriage	393	4.7	209	2.7	161	28.1
Pregnant when married	1,166	13.9	1,074	13.8	86	15.0
Postmaritally pregnant	6,838	81.4	6,489	83.5	325	56.8

Rural to Urban Migrants

Total	5,393	100.0	4,940	100.0	577	100.0
Child before marriage	312	5.6	157	3.2	146	25.3
Pregnant when married	805	14.4	651	13.2	131	22.7
Postmaritally pregnant	4,476	80.0	4,133	83.7	300	52.0

Urban of Urban Origins

Total	20,763	100.0	18,593	100.0	1,968	100.0
Child before marriage	1,137	5.5	567	3.0	561	28.5
Pregnant when married	2,549	12.3	2,034	10.9	490	24.9
Postmaritally pregnant	17,078	82.2	15,996	86.0	918	46.6

Source = 1967 SEO

* The population of analysis is every married mothers

** All races includes whites, Negroes, and "other non-white races"; therefore whites and Negroes do not sum precisely to the all races figure

TABLE II

Marital Dissolution Incidences by Pregnancy Status at Marriage, Residence Status, and Race*

Ever Married Mothers at Risk of Marital Dissolution	All Races** At Risk (000)	Percent Dissolved	White At Risk (000)	Percent Dissolved	Negro At Risk (000)	Percent Dissolved
Rural of Rural Origins						
Premaritally Pregnant	1,559	13.6	1,283	11.6	247	21.5
Postmaritally Pregnant	6,838	12.1	6,489	11.6	325	22.5
Rural to Urban Migrants						
Premaritally Pregnant	1,117	24.6	808	20.3	277	37.2
Postmaritally Pregnant	4,476	20.1	4,133	18.6	300	41.7
Urban of Urban Origins						
Premaritally Pregnant	3,686	23.1	2,601	18.0	1,051	36.1
Postmaritally Pregnant	17,078	17.5	15,996	16.1	918	43.7

Source = 1967 SEO

* See Table I

** See Table I

TABLE III

Marital Dissolution Incidences by Pregnancy Status at Marriage, Residence Status, Age at Marriage and Race*

Age Women Married	At Risk (000)	Percent Diss.	At Risk (000)	Percent Diss.
	WHITE			
	Rural of Rural Origins			
	Premaritally Pregnant		Postmaritally Pregnant	
Under 18	449	13.8	1,067	18.8
18-21	581	12.7	3,048	9.0
22+	255	5.5	1,454	7.4
	Rural to Urban Migrants			
Under 18	239	28.0	1,046	30.1
18-21	360	16.9	1,811	17.4
22+	206	17.5	1,276	10.7
	Urban of Urban Origins			
Under 18	647	22.6	3,398	31.3
18-21	1,296	19.0	7,388	14.6
22+	631	11.1	5,211	8.1
	NEGRO			
	Rural of Rural Origins			
Under 18	80	31.3	140	32.1
18-21	106	20.8	138	15.2
22+	60	10.0	47	14.9
	Rural to Urban Migrants			
Under 18	101	58.4	134	60.4
18-21	104	30.8	99	33.3
22+	72	18.1	69	15.9
	Urban of Urban Origins			
Under 18	354	49.4	370	58.1
18-21	422	30.3	340	39.4
22+	274	27.4	207	26.1

Source - 1967 SEO

* See Table I

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